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AUTHOR Kobak, Dorothy
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ABSTRACT

There is proof that caring can be taught and, that it can be programmed into the curriculum, with teacher training and administrative support, on a structured daily basis. Teaching children to care and raising the "CQ" or "Caring Quality" belongs in all education. Teaching children to care involves a number of techniques. These can be classified under the heading of "Input Opportunities" and include a daily class dialogue period, the use of creativity tools, and the use of action projects. (Author/EB)

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TEACHING CHILDREN TO CARE

By Dorothy Kobak, Ph.D.

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TEACHING CHILDREN TO CARE

By

Dorothy Kobak, Ph.D.

Some time ago, the newspapers carried an article about a teacher who gave an assignment to her class. She instructed: "Write a composition on the day I became president." One student wrote: "That day somebody tried to shoot me, but my guys got him, and they sent him to the gas chamber." Another little girl said, "I shook the hands of people who had given me the first privilege of being a woman president. Then I saw that there was a gun and it was in the hands of my opponent. I told my security guard." A sixth grader wrote: "I became president and was riding in my bullet proof car and when I saw the car I fainted. It was a black hearse. I didn't want to die so young, even as president, so I fainted." The teacher said that not once in the assignment did she ever mention or allude to the word "assassination." Yet almost half of the students equated becoming president with assassination.

Statistics tell us that there is a murder every 43 minutes, a rape every 19 minutes, a robbery every 2½ minutes, and a burglary every 20 seconds. Also, that 600 million dollars is spent as a result of school vandalism which, in New York City, is more than the total amount spent on textbooks. It is also estimated that there are seventy thousand serious attacks upon teachers, as expressions of aggression, hostility, and fear which lie behind that violence. The world's leading psychiatrists and psychologists, Menninger, Maslow, Sullivan, and others teach us that "loneliness is the central experience in the evolution of mental illness," and that "the ultimate disease of our time is valuelessness." While Ashley Montagu, world famous sociologist, refutes the fact that man is a "naked ape," born with aggression and a tendency to destroy. He states that when a baby is born, the child is born not only wanting and needing love and affection, but also "<u>wanting and needing to love others.</u>"

In a Conference sponsored by The Menninger Foundation,the world's leading psychiatric facility, the theme was on how to develop "a caring society," with the final conclusion that attentiveness must be given by the educational institution to help children grow and develop their caring capacity. "These are the choices that make us human," writes Rene Dubos, Pulitzer prize-winning scientist who, in his book, BEAST OR ANGEL, stresses that if we use the power of choice, our value system can include conduct which is caring, so that we will perform in a differentiated manner from our biological relatives, to perpetuate and enhance rather than destroy life. Finally, the National Education Association published an article on "The Seven Cardinal Principles of Education." In it, Dr. Jonas Salk proclaimed his thought. "We need to help children develop nobility! I think this can be taught, just as we teach math, reading, or biology. To me one of the seven cardinal principles of education is to develop ethical character."

Caring can be taught! Students, within the educational system, are being deprived of an entitlement. They are not being taught "Caring Skills" on an ongoing, consistent basis, along with their academic subjects. Education pays too little attention to its responsibility in developing "CARING" individuals. In my work in the school system, with hundreds of students, there is proof that caring can be taught as a learnable, teachable subject and, that it can be programmed into the curriculum, with teacher training and administrative support, on a structured daily basis. If carried through, there is ample reason to believe that students will study and learn ways to develop their "CQ" or "Caring Quality" concurrent with their academic growth. Moreover, this opportunity should be mandated.

The urgency of the need for caring individuals in the family, community and society is self-obvious. One need only view the deterioration of ethical values, increases in personal breakdown, crime, war, and maladaptive behavior where isolation, depersonalization, and alienation have become substitutes for cooperation, commitment, and concern for common welfare and total good. So much clinical and educational training, all valid, is focused on understanding and curing crime, drug addiction, alcoholism, mental illness, etc. Yet little is done academically in formally studying the principles, skills, and techniques inherent in "The Ways and Power of Love," as written and described by Pitirim Sorokin, prominent sociologist, who worked out of Harvard University's Center for Creative Altruism.

"Teaching Children To Care" is not, nor should it be, a vague effort on the part of benign teachers who, as commendable as this is, wish to play a more vital role individually in the character development of their students. Rather, raising the "C.Q." or "Caring Quality" is a "subject" responsive to teaching principles, daily class lessons and dialogues, creativity techniques, and action projects. It should permeate all subjects, extra curricular activity, and total school orientation, commencing as early as kindergarten and continuing until high school, or beyond into college.

The concept of "Teaching Children To Care" was first initiated in 1969. As a Psychiatric School Social Worker from the Bureau of Child Guidance, Board of Education in New York City, I was assigned to the Walter Reed School and the Robert Peary School. These are "SPECIAL" schools where students continue their education separately from the mainstream classroom, due to their emotional and behavioral problems. The commencement and continuation of the project is implemented with the total cooperation and support of Dr. Albert Budnick, Director of the

Bureau of Socially Maladjusted and Emotionally Disturbed Children and two Principals, Mr. Max Vogel and Mr. Irwin Shanes. However, it is vital to understand and accept that Teaching Children To Care, and raising their "CQ" or "Caring Quality" does not only belong in SPECIAL EDUCATION. It belongs in all education. My work with students has illustrated that middle class and wealthy children in "silk stocking" schools also show ethical conduct that is deteriorated. Treatment towards each other is cruel and unfeeling. Internalized values from parents and peers are staggeringly low in caring.

The techniques I have evolved are designed to stimulate, develop and internalize the Caring Quality by structured attentiveness to "INPUT OPPORTUNITIES." The rationale is that the more opportunity for involvement in the caring experience during the student's day, the greater will become the proportionate growth, intensity and duration of the "C.Q." or "Caring Quality." Moreover, the INPUT OPPORTUNITY, by becoming familiar, helps reduce the THREAT LEVEL in caring, and aids in strengthening the COMFORT LEVEL. Therefore, students find themselves encouraged to repeat and re-enter other caring experiences because of the positive and pleasureable recall, rather than the risk and anxiety formerly associated with caring expressions. This is accomplished by three INPUT OPPORTUNITIES, totally consistent with educational principles of learning and teaching:

1. The daily class dialogue "period."
2. The use of creativity tools.
3. The use of action projects.

The daily class dialogue period should be ongoing throughout the school year, programmed into the day, and always at the same hour. At this dialgoue session, material is introduced for discussion, based on prepared topics or follow-up of a "spontaneous" subject introduced by the class which occurred in their recent experience, and had touched off emotional response.

These latter have included the drowning of a fellow student, the death of a parent, a national catastrophe, a misfortune to a staff member, a severe fight between students, etc. The prepared topics introduced by the teacher also related to students' reality situations. They begin with very early primitive talks on caring, with definitions and descriptions. Later, these include truancy, stealing, fighting, drugs, underachieving, fears of rejection and inadequacy, peer pressure, family relationships, etc. These topics move also into more esoteric discussions to include empathy, sympathy, sacrifice, etc., as realism indicates.

The following illustrate "caring" examples of classroom topics. All discussion is geared to statement or question. This is followed by intensive dialogue as the crucial component, and is always geared to caring as a mandate in self-assessment and behavioral change.

Wonder Questions

"What's the hardest part of being a friend?" "I wonder why Frankie never smiles?"

Empathy Questions

"What are some of the hardships of your parents?"
Answers: "I make them worry. I stay out late."
Dialogue: "How can Joe be more caring, so his parents would not worry?"

Philosophical Questions

"Who is your enemy?"
Answers: "My sister is my enemy!"
Dialogue: "Why do people become enemies?" "Can caring change enemies to friends?"

Identification Questions

"Who is the saddest person you know?"

Answers: "Old people, sick people, lonely people are sad."
Dialogue: "Why do you find them sad?" "Did you ever care for such people?" "Did it make a difference?"
Answers: "Yes, my grandma, or the lady upstairs, or an old blind man. I shopped, helped them across the street, read them a book, etc."

Alternative Questions

"Did you every try to avoid a fight and talk it out instead?"
Answers: "I wish I could. I can't stop beating people up. I'm scared. I'm afraid I'll go to jail."
Dialogue: "How can we help John? We care about his worry and fear. Let's see if we can think of other ways for him to talk or act, so he can stop beating up people, and being afraid.
Solution: Lists were made of cruel names to be eliminated. Sensitive feelings were probed and isolated. New routes to avoidance and resolution of fights are offered.
Result: The whole class internalizes new ways to solve fighting problems with caring alternatives.

Problem Questions

"Your teacher, Mr. Jones, feels bad that he lent Tom his personal book as a favor and Tom does not return it. Class, what could we do?"
Answers: "I'll beat him up for Mr. Jones!" "Make him pay!" "Don't let him graduate!"
Re-Orientation: "But, class, we want to help Tom remember. What can we do to help Tom care that Mr. Jones feels bad?"
Dialogue: "I'll phone Tom and remind him." "I'll call for Tom in the morning and we'll walk to school together."
Solution: Tom got phone calls and company to remind him.
Result: Tom saw caring about his problem of forgetting. Then he could care about Mr. Jones feeling bad.

Truancy

Statement: "Pedro does not come to school at all. How can we help Pedro?"

Answers: "We don't care! If he doesn't want to learn, let him not graduate! It's his tough luck!"

Re-Orientation:

1."Class, we are learning caring experiences. We want to show Pedro somebody cares that he is out of school.

2. "Why do you think he could be truanting?

3. "What can we do to help him?"

Dialogue: "Maybe he can't do the work. Maybe he has to help his mother. Maybe he has bad friends. We will send a letter. We will tell him he will not get a good job and make money if he does not go to school."

"But, class, how does such a letter show him you care about him and his problems and worries?"

Solution: The final letter to Pedro: "We miss you. Your seat is empty in the back of the room. If you come back to school, we will be glad to see you."

Result: Pedro returned to school and remained the rest of the term. He perceived: "I am missed in that seat back there. Somebody really wants me to come back. I'll take a risk and come back." Class had successful, pleasureable feedback.

Additional caring topics could be: MUTUAL HELP DIALOGUES, in which a classmate is helped in a personal problem or dilemma that is shared. Example: "Tommy tells us he wants to get off smoking pot. How can we share this problem with him and help?"

Another topic is ANGER AND JUSTICE DIALOGUES in which questions are raised about classmates. Example: "How come Billy never shares candy with us when we always share with him?" In dialogue, insights are reached that perhaps Billy was never given

to and so has to hoard. In probing for a caring solution, somebody ultimately says: "I guess the way to change him is to care enough about him and continue to give him anyway."

Another area for exploration is the RESISTANCE DIALOGUE. Here the discussion ensures around internalized values accrued from personal life experiences or societal norms. These include: "Why should I care? Who cares for me?" Or else, "Only the fool cares in our world! You have to be out for yourself or you get nowhere! You will be laughed at and taken advantage of by everybody!" Discussion here is around risk-taking and sacrifice, for an accepted value system and what this entails in making such a decision of choice.

The topics suggested for dialogue are by no means mandatory. They are open to the educators discretion, and personal skill and imagination. Also, it is governed by insight into the nature of the pupil population, such as the socio-economic levels, emotional difficulties, intellectual accomplishments, and any other isolating factors deemed relevant.

It is to be further noted that dialogues in caring do not necessarily emphasize: "It is "WRONG" to truant, borrow and not return, or to steal, etc." Nor, is a "CONSEQUENCE" such as punishment or getting caught, the prime focus of dialogue, although these are significant realities. But rather, emphasis is placed on: "How do you think Wilfredo feels when you steal his ballpoint pen? Or, when you make fun of him, or call him a name?" "Did anybody ever steal your pen? How did you feel?," etc. Also, wherever possible, insults or degradation are handled immediately and discussed at once. Always there is an apology and handshake required. Then the incident is dropped and dialogue resumed.

A further technique to be used as implementation is "fun homework." This is not mandatory but optional. The goal is to give experience in identification, definition, and observation of caring.

Example:"In the next 24-hour period, write down all the situations you saw of people being caring." Later this is isolated to include and observe their own behavior. "Between breakfast and dinner, can you cite the times you were caring?" This attentiveness to caring yields great increase in quality and quantity of caring insights from "no example" to dozens, as their discernment is sharpened.

The second large area of "education for caring" is accomplished by using creativity techniques, such as poetry, drama, clay, murals, school newspapers, music, video tape, role playing, and psychodrama. All tools used are focused on the caring concept. Poems are a superb way to reach out for feelings, and are selected specifically on that basis. In reading a poem on "loneliness," we asked who felt lonely in the class. When Milton raised his hand, the class was involved in a caring dialogue. The "INPUT OPPORTUNITY" was Milton's loneliness, which he described. The class was given an opportunity to respond with solutions. They evolved a plan to call him every afternoon and visit him on week-ends. The poem was the springboard for the action. Such response builds ego strength in the giver. It verifies his feelings of effectiveness, self-satisfaction, and self-esteem, thereby aiding the mental health concept within him of a good self-image.

Clay offers an excellent opportunity to translate a thought into an emotion and, finally, into an object that is made. The object is then a focus for a caring dialogue.

EXAMPLE: "Make the word SAD." One boy made a tree without leaves with his clay. A discussion on sadness followed. Later, the boys were asked, "Make the word HAPPY." The same boy put leaves on his tree. A caring dialogue then proceeded on: "How do you help somebody who is sad? How do you change sad to happy?"

Similar discussions can be precipitated with specially chosen musical records, TV stories, and students' school plays on caring concepts. These are acted out, after being written by themselves from recording their own realistic scripts while they are talking on various caring topics.

A school newspaper could have a CARING COLUMN with "CARING REPORTERS" who observe the school and report caring incidents for the newspaper. The "caring reporters" receive a by-line. Such items help students internalize positive socialization skills, through positive recall and recognition of their caring efforts.

Great attentiveness to the caring concept is internalized when the Art Teacher guides several classes in constructing a school mural on CARING. This demands a dialogue first, in terms of what is to be included, then cooperative teamwork in executing the finished product. In this process, many caring lessons have therefore been learned. The finished product is a source of pride to themselves and visitors when it is hung in the main hall of the school, while they "learned" caring in a pleasureable, ego-building way.

Where video is available, role playing and psychodrama that is immediately played back, viewed, and dialogued, offers a good opportunity to observe the self in "caring action." Self-consciousness wears off as the familiarity of the self in such a role becomes more commonplace. "I see myself acting like a

caring person." This verifies the possibility, and increases the COMFORT LEVEL in caring.

The third implementation we have used to raise students' "CQ" or "CARING QUALITY" is the ACTION PROJECT. A valued principle in education is learning by doing. This is where the CARING PROJECT becomes so meaningful.

There are endless opportunities for caring action projects. Action projects help caring to be internalized in 4 ways:

1. DIALOGUE: For constructing and conceptualizing.
2. ORGANIZATION: For an experience in working together with commitment and cooperation.
3. CULMINATION: To experience the goal satisfaction and positive recall.
4. POST-DIALOGUE: An evaluation of the caring dynamics and their feelings involved in the experience.

EXAMPLES OF ACTION PROJECTS

1. "PENNIES FOR PEOPLE,"

CONCERN: "For whom would you like to collect pennies?" "Poor people who are hungry in Africa." "Why?" (A discussion follows on hunger, poverty, compassion, responsibility, sharing, etc.)

COMMITMENT: "How should he do it?" "Let's have a jar and watch the pennies grow." "We'll put a label on the jar: 'Pennies For People'." "We better watch that nobody steals any pennies!"

POST DIALOGUE: To evaluate feelings, attitudes, disappointments, satisfactions, risks, etc. This is a mandatory part of ACTION PROJECTS, as it affords pupils the opportunity to observe and evaluate their own process safely and constructively.

CULMINATION: When 500 pennies were collected, the money was sent to CARE. They received a wonderful letter of thanks, information as to what village in Africa would use the money, and for what purpose. The Principal announced the results and congratulated the boys. The process and feedback included learning and pleasure, yielding positive recall for future caring involvements.

2. COMMUNITY ACTION PROJECT.

Here a class of 5th grade students "adopted" a nursing home. They make monthly visits there and plan programs, discussions, gifts, and chats. Post-dialogue after visits evaluates feelings, attitudes and results, always focused on the relationship to the caring concept, as experienced. (Fear, disgust, compassion, identification, satisfaction,etc.)

3. "CHILDREN CARING FOR CHILDREN."

Here an 8th grade class was involved in a game, gym, and tutorial program with a 5th grade class. Pairing took place at the beginning and "couples" remained the same throughout the school year. The goal was to have the older students act as caring role models to younger students to befriend them, help them, and relate to them in warm and supportive ways. The caring dialogues, prior to each encounter, related to the principles of CONCERN, COMMITMENT, and CULMINIATION, with the POST-DIALOGUE, after each encounter, after each encounter, yielded excellent "practice" in IN-PUT OPPORTUNITY to both younger and older pupils for mutual growth in caring: helpfulness in reading, teaching skills in gym, exchanging gifts, joint trips, protection and advice, etc.

4. "CITIZENS OF THE WEEK."

This is a teacher-pupil project in which each week (for immediate rather than long-term reward) students are chosen by the teacher to become "CITIZENS OF THE WEEK." There is no limit to how many can be chosen in each class. The basis for choice is

doing or saying something caring which is then acknowledged and recognized, giving the pleasureable recall to the recipient and, thereby, helping to reduce the risk or threat level for repetitive caring in the future. The recognition comes by an announcement over the loudspeaker, made by the Principal, of the names of the honored, so the whole school hears.this. There is a CARING BULLETIN BOARD outside the Principal's office. All the winners have their picture taken and these are placed on that Bulletin Board. Finally, a letter is sent hom to the parent to notify them that their child was selected as CITIZEN OF THE WEEK. This is an incentive project and increases the attentiveness to caring conduct.

5. RECOGNITION PROJECTS.

This project dialogues the need and the skill to choose people and show that they are cared for and recognized. It offers an exercise in selectivity with reasons and planning the recognition. One such project chose to honor the lunchroom workers who served and prepared the students' school lunch. Students devised a plaque which was made in Shop, in conjunction with the Shop teacher. Caring copy had to be thought up and written on the plaque, which they worked out in their writing class. Finally, the Principal called a special Assembly, and the plaque was presented in an oral presentation which involved coaching and preparation in the Speech class. The whole school was a recipient of this "IN-PUT OPPORTUNITY," as they witnessed the ceremony. The caring concept was further internalized by all the students in the sharing and acting out that they observed. The whole project was an exercise in reinforcement of the idea that caring should be expressed as well as felt and that this is too often neglected.

6. <u>SPECIAL EVENTS PROJECTS.</u>

These projects relate to specific occasions. Holidays make for excellent caring projects. Some can be very simple: "Come back after Thanksgiving and share one way that you showed

thankfulness to another person." Another assignment for Christmas was: "Can you give YOURSELF as a gift this Christmas? Come back and tell us how it worked." These projects help allay feelings of shyness, shame, or anxiety in caring which so abets our depersonalized and alienated relating to one another.

Graduation is a special event. One project involves giving a CARING AWARD to the graduate who has been the most caring. This is a special honor, and it is innovative because no graduation, in spite of all the awards and medals given out, ever gives an award specifically named for caring. At graduation, therefore, the classmates, parents, siblings and visitors attending, learned that caring is recognized in a school where caring is taught.

7. GOOD CHEER PROJECTS.

These are projects which have to do with calamities which occur to the intra-school family. When one boy got hit by a bus, he received letters and gifts during his convalescence. When a school handyman was hospitalized, he received "jokes and riddles" to help pass the day. When Carmen, the School Aide, was robbed, the boys gave a nickel each and bought her flowers.

One last, large area significant in raising students' "CQ" or "CARING QUALITY," is through subject material in a class lesson. In a Social Studies lesson, a teacher oriented to the caring concept raised the question: "Why do you think Edison invented the light bulb?" Most answers related to "he wanted to get rich." But a caring dialogue incorporated in the Social Studies class enlarged the motivation. An understanding of the concept that people do things also for the good of mankind was evolved. Social Studies offers endless opportunities to ponder ethical concern and moral reasoning through history.

Another such caring lesson was accomplished in a Science class. The Science teacher conducted an experiment in which he put gerbils and hamsters together in one cage. The object was to see how animals feel and make new friends. He planned to teach new words: UNITED, FEELINGS, SHARE AND FRIGHTENED. He questioned how his students treat new people, and then asked them to observe the gerbils and hamsters. "Would they fight or ignore each other, or would they play? Would they be frightened? Would they share their food or hoard? After the observations and demonstrations, he asked them to draw cartoons having the hamsters and gerbils saying something to each other. The analogy soon became obvious to the students that there was fear and love in animals and, of course, in people, and a caring dialogue ensued for deeper understanding into the whole dilemma.

Library periods are also excellent areas for guided reading, discussion, and book reporting with hundreds of titles geared specifically for character and ethical concern written into adventure, humor, mystery and narratives. All pleasureable and easy to read.

The effectiveness of a program for TEACHING CHILDREN TO CARE is also contingent largely upon administrative acceptance of the total concept with allowability for the caring idea to permeate as a total school motif in all areas of academics, electives, and social interaction. This implies also giving ample time allotment, support and encouragement to staff for developing expertise in the area. One Principal, who includes TEACHING CHILDREN TO CARE in his school, stands at the door after each holiday and welcomes students back with interest and affection. He also sends "HAPPY-GRAMS" out to classes, teachers and parents relating positive events in a warm, informal closeness. Where school principals have given this support and included the "subject" of caring into the curriculum formally, consistently, and effectively, there have

been gains in academic achievement, classroom management, and school harmony. The implication for family and community are far reaching, in addition to personal mental health and happiness. Maladaptive behavior is connected to the breakdown in the caring capacity and pathology results when the caring capacity is not regenerated.

In this school the Library teacher wrote a "fan letter." He wrote to the Principal, without knowing this class was involved in a Caring Club. "I am recommending for commendation this class. The class displays such harmony of spirit as they work together. Their cooperativeness is taking hold." It was unsolicited!

Many results of a school program for raising the "CQ" or "CARING QUALITY" in children are assessed in simple ways. Students do more sharing of candy. They hold doors open more frequently. They ask to be helpful more often. These gains are observable. If input is compounded and consistent, measureable gains in caring capacity and behavior can be predicted and internalized as socialization skills.

In TEACHING CHILDREN TO CARE, the important thing is to begin. The end result, in terms of length of time needed to effect a caring society, is not the issue. A beginning is the issue! Beginning in education is the issue! H. G. Wells wrote: "Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe." Education must mandate to itself a role in preventing catastrophe and more: educating for ethical and altruistic concern. It is teachable, learnable, desirable, and essential. These skills belong in education and no student should be deprived of the opportunity to learn, perfect, and use these skills.

TEACHING CHILDREN TO CARE and raising the "CQ" or "CARING QUALITY" through education may be finalized philosophically by a more enlightened commentary of Fritz Perls' words. The famous

quote from Perls is cited first:

> "I do my thing and you do yours. I am not in this world to live up to your expectations, and you are not in this world to live up to mine. I am "I" and you are "you," and if, by chance, we find each other, it's beautiful. If not, it cannot be helped."

This is a truth, but it is avoiding and limited, taking no risks, no reaching out. Here is the commentary, author unknown, which epitomizes "TEACHING CHILDREN TO CARE."

> "If I just do my thing and you just do yours, we stand in danger of losing each other and ourselves. I am not in this world to live up to your expectations, but I am in this world to confirm you as a unique human being and to be confirmed by you. We are fully ourselves only in relation to each other. The "I" detached from the "Thou" disintegrates. I did not find you by chance. I find you by an act of Life, of reaching out, rather than passively letting things happen to me, I can act intentionally to make them happen. I must begin with myself, true, but I must not end in myself."